**The Vesta**

by

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PAGE ONE - EXTERIOR to INTERIOR - 6 PANELS

1. FULL HORIZONTAL PANEL - EXTERIOR
A space ship, viewed from slightly below in one-point perspective. It is huge, longer than it is wide, with very few tiny windows along the side. It is not sleek. It has the look of something that has been added onto over time, as needed, but its underlying structure is rounded, like a 19th-century sea-going ship. It is not pristine. Its hull is dirty with space dust; newer parts are less dirty. In the background is blackness and stars.

The caption lettering is in script.

CAPTION
The *Vesta*. She is as big as a city block.

2. EXTERIOR
Closer -- so that only the side of the ship and a couple of the tiny windows fill the panel. In one window is the outline of someone walking past.

CAPTION
Within her, thirty-eight men and twenty-two women. She is our home.

No, she is more than that --

3. INTERIOR
Our protagonist -- SHRIYA -- is walking down a hallway, but she has paused to look out the window we just saw her outlined in. (Not stopped -- just paused mid-stride.) The walls of the hallway are curved outward slightly, like a subway tunnel. There are doors lining it on one side, the occasional window on the other.

SHRIYA is in her early 30s. She is of Indian (South Asian) descent, with brown skin and a cloud of black wavy hair that floats around her head (despite there being artificial gravity on the ship.) Her body is thin and angular. Her face is neutral, almost disconcertingly so. She wears elegant but practical clothes -- close-fitting trousers, a blouse (perhaps like a kurta), a scarf. She also wears a spiral-shaped earpiece in her right ear.

CAPTION

She is a womb.

4. SHRIYA's shoulders and head. Her head is cocked slightly as VVI (Vessel Voice Interface, which the inhabitants of the *Vesta* call "Viv") makes talks to her through her earpiece. VIV's balloons always are square with rounded corners and translucent background. Their tails are jagged and point toward the earpiece. A rounded, "technical" looking font with upper and lower case, like Comicraft's Lunar Modular or Blambot's Self Destruct Button. Dialogue lettering is in a font that has upper and lower case (like Blambot's Cloud Splitter or Comicraft's Code Monkey).

VIV
(balloon tail pointed to upper left of panel)
Dr. Singh, you are needed in Nursery A.

SHRIYA
Thank you, Viv.

PAGE TWO - INTERIOR - 6 PANELS

1. SHRIYA walks toward a double door that opens upon her approach. There is a sign above the door that reads "NURSERY A." Through the doors we see a lush, verdant space, a hydroponic garden.

VIV
You'll find Dr. Freund waiting for you.

2. DR. FREUND is an Unexpectedly Hot Scientist. Not in a burly kind of way, just young and handsome and blond, like Dr. Chase on HOUSE or Ken Cosgrove on MAD MEN. He wears a telescoping eye-piece, kind of like a jeweler's loupe. He's standing in front of a large hydroponic tank full of plants and lifting the lid to reveal a system of intertwined roots.

DR. FREUND
Oh, good, Shriya, you're here. Look at the ***mycorrhiza*** formation on this root structure -- I knew you'd be the ***only*** one besides me to appreciate it.

3. Close up on the root structure (see ref.) as SHRIYA and DR. FREUND are both examining the plant's roots. Just the root and their hands in the panel. The dialogue balloon is at the bottom of the panel so that the panels read in the correct order.

DR. FREUND
(off panel - tail pointed in the direction of his hand)
This strain of fungus increases the plants' moisture and nutrient absorption by almost 30%.

It's a ***perfect*** system, isn't it?

SHRIYA
(off panel - tail pointed in the direction of her hand)
No system is perfect, but this is as ***close*** as you'll get.

4. A round, microscopic view of the mycorrhiza, a system of plant roots and beneficial fungus (see ref.), is inset into this panel. SHRIYA, seen from behind, walks down the corridors of the *Vesta*. Other people, of both sexes and various races and ages, appear as translucent figures. Their dialogue balloons are also translucent.

CAPTION
Our mission has no destination. It is simply to live -- as the *Vesta* carries us where she will.

PASSERBY 1
Good morning, Shriya.

PASSERBY 2
Hi, Dr. Singh.

PASSERBY 3
Hey, Shriya -- see you at lunch?

5. SHRIYA continues down the hall. Two children run by her, their mother behind them (they are not translucent).

CAPTION
And so we do. We live.

MOTHER
***Walk***, you two! You almost knocked down Dr. Singh!

6. SHRIYA is in the ship's cafeteria, standing at the order counter with a tray. On the other side is an older woman, shorter and almost stereotypically motherly -- round, kind-faced, serving food. SHRIYA looks slightly uncomfortable.

CAFETERIA LADY
I made this batch ***just*** for you, Shriya -- everything grown in that ***garden*** of yours.

SHRIYA
It's not ***my*** garden. There's a whole team of --

CAFETERIA LADY
Nonsense, dear, it's ***yours***. We wouldn't have all this lovely food if it weren't for you. ***Everybody*** knows that.

PAGE 3 - INTERIOR - 4 PANELS

1. INTERIOR - SHRIYA is standing at one of the tiny porthole windows again. We see her from behind, her hand on the edge of the glass. Outside, it is black, without even any stars.

VIV
Dr. Singh, it is eighteen hundred hours ship's time. Shall I change your work status to "Unavailable"?

SHRIYA
Hm? Oh. Yes. Thank you.

2. EXTERIOR - Tight on SHRIYA from the outside of the *Vesta*, close enough to see her in the attitude of the previous panel. Her eyes are wide, her mouth firm and set. The porthole glows.

CAPTION
We don't know where she is taking us -- if she is taking us anywhere at all. We don't need to know. Or we're not supposed to.

3. EXTERIOR - Tighter on her through the porthole. Just her face, her eyes orbs of black, with no light reflected in them.

4. Her left eye, with the image from the microscope super-imposed in negative.

CAPTION
Something is wrong.

PAGE 4 - 5 PANELS

The first two panels of this page mirrors page 2 in layout and panel content. However, small details are different -- what people wear, the color of their hair, different people altogether. The reader is meant to notice this if they are reading closely, but on first glance it's as if everything is repeating. It's kind of like those "spot the difference" drawings in newspapers.

1. Like panel 5 on page 2, but the round inset is the reflection in SHRIYA's eye from the last panel of page 3. The dialogue balloons are the same -- translucent -- but they are empty.

CAPTION
She provides everything.

The faces. The voices. They don't change. ***I*** don't change.

2. The same as panel 4 on page 2, but, again, the dialogue balloon is empty.

CAPTION
It's as if she wants me to be content. As if they ***all*** want me to be content.

3. The same as page 2, panel 2. VIV's dialogue ballon is *not* translucent.

CAPTION
But if I don't change, do I exist?

VIV
(balloon tail pointed to upper left of panel)
Dr. Singh, you are needed in Nursery A.

4. The same as page 3, panel 1. DR. FREUND's balloon is translucent and empty.

CAPTION
If they only do what makes ***me*** content, do ***they*** exist?

5. SHRIYA approaches him. We see her from behind, but we can see from his reaction that he doesn't suspect anything is strange. No dialogue, no caption.

PAGE 5 - INTERIOR - 6 panels

1. SHRIYA kisses DR. FREUND.

CAPTION
Maybe I'm the only one.

2. SHRIYA has turned away from DR. FREUND. We can see that he is shaken, shaken in a good way.

CAPTION
I thought something unexpected -- but,
no, nothing changes at all.

3. SHRIYA is farther from DR. FREUND. He is reaching toward her, to touch her arm, tentatively.

DR. FREUND
Shriya --

4. SHRIYA is in the extreme foreground of the panel, on the left, part of her right side cut off. Her face is completely impassive. Behind her, DR. FREUND has dropped his hand as she walks away, looking confused.

DR. FREUND
Shriya? Are you all right?

SHRIYA
Yes, fine. As fine as ever.

5. SHRIYA is exiting Nursery A. She looks extremely determined. The background is ever so slightly translucent, ever so slightly wobbly toward the panel edges.

CAPTION
Joy is dangerous. Sadness is dangerous.
Love is dangerous.

6. SHRIYA continues down the hall, looking as if she's floating, with her toes barely brushing the ground and her hair floating mroe around her. The hall stretches behind her, THE SHINING style. Superimposed on the background is a translucent image of the hull of the *Vesta*, looking like a huge metal whale swimming through space.

CAPTION
She keeps me in the palm of the hand.
***Safe.*** Always safe.

PAGE 6 - 5 PANELS

1. SHRIYA “lands” (as if she has floated down from space, through the hull of the ship and back inside of it) in a coat-room like room, except instead of coats, there are space suits hanging on the walls, and helmets on a shelf above them instead of hats.

CAPTION
I want something to exist besides my-
self.

2. SHRIYA stands regarding the space suits.

CAPTION
I want to be unsafe.

3. Same as panel 5, but SHRIYA is turned away from the space suits.

VIV
Dr. Shriya Singh, you are needed in
Nursery A.

The next three panels are small squares, descending like steps down a white background.

4. SHRIYA in profile, still regarding the space suits. She has reached up to her ear and grasped the earpiece.

5. SHRIYA’s hand, the earpiece falling out of it.

6. The earpiece landing on the floor.

SFX
CHK

PAGE 7 - 6 panels

1. (narrow) SHRIYA unhooks one of the space suits from the wall.

2. (wide) SHRIYA from behind as she walks through a double air lock door into a white room with another double door at the opposite end. She is wearing the space suit -- with boots, gloves and all -- and holding the helmet under her arm. The space suit isn't bulky, like they are now, but it's still fairly padded, like a bulkier version of a fencing uniform.

SFX
(door opening)
BSSHHH

The next 3 panels are small squares, all in a row.

3. SHRIYA from the front as she lowers the helmet over her head.

4. Same POV, now she is tucking her hair underneath it.

5. She presses a button to seal the helmet.

SFX
SSHHHK

6. Full horizontal panel. SHRIYA, seen from behind, has just pushed a button next to the double door on the opposite side of the room. The doors are open, and she stands in front of the black and stars of space.

PAGE 8 - 5 panels

1. Same view as last panel, but SHRIYA is not inside the airlock room anymore. She is floating out into space, untethered.
2. (EXTERIOR) SHRIYA is floating away from the ship, which we see in a three-quarter view. Near the border of the panel we see a hint of one of the *Vesta*'s retrieval arms, with a large hand-like apparatus at the end.
3. Closer. The hand apparatus is closing in on SHRIYA.
4. Closer, like page 4, panel 3. We can see SHRIYA's face through the glass of her helmet. She is oblivious to the hand as she gazes out into space.
5. Closer, on her eye, like page 4, panel 4. However, now, instead of the mycorrhiza reflected in her eye, there are stars.

CAPTION
(in text font, not SHRIYA's interior monologue font)
END